

Benares," and a paper by Michael Witzel in which he placed Nepal in a larger Himalayan context, relating it in particular to Kashmir.

The only section on the last day was dedicated to art history. Adalbert Gail examined mutual iconographic influences in "Buddhist and Hindu tantra art in Eastern India and Nepal," while Anne Vergati presented a Newar painting depicting Kathmandu Valley and the pilgrimage to Siluthi. The conference concluded with a final plenary session dedicated to a resume of the conference.

It is not in good style for someone involved with the organization to declare the conference a success. However, I feel that it was precisely this: densely packed programme with many excellent talks that demonstrated progress in the field of Nepalese Studies and showed that new vistas of research are opening up. There were lively discussions which demonstrated that despite their high degree of specialization the talks were of general interest for the interdisciplinary audience. Most importantly, there was a relaxed and amicable atmosphere which aided the resumption of old contacts and the formation of new ones. The conference showed how useful and fruitful it can be to occasionally convene such interdisciplinary and international meetings of scholars dedicated to the study of Nepal, so it is comforting that there was talk of organizing a similar conference in France in a few years' time.

It is planned to publish the conference's proceedings in a joint Nepalese-German publication. Until then the homepage of the conference (<http://www.uni-leipzig.de/~indzaw/indo/gemeinsam/nepalkonferenz/>) may be consulted for precise details of the programme and abstracts of the talks. Thanks are due to the conveners of the conference, and most importantly to Adelheid Buschner from the Institute of Indian and Central Asian Studies who took care of all practical arrangements most competently. The conference would have been impossible without generous funding by the German Research Council (DFG) and the support of the Akademisches Begegnungszentrum Leipzig which provided the venue for the conference, the beautiful Villa Tillemanns, the traditional guest house of the University of Leipzig.

Research Report: Labour Migration from Far West Nepal to Delhi, India

By Susan Thieme, Michael Kollmair, Ulrike Müller-Böker

Labour migration from Far West Nepal to Delhi, India, is the topic of the ongoing PhD project from Susan Thieme at the Department of Geography at the University of Zurich. The thesis is part of the NCCR (National Centre of Competence in Research) North-South funded by the Swiss National Science

Foundation (SNF) and Swiss Development Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

Within the NCCR, the Department of Geography in Zurich focuses on institutional changes and livelihood strategies in marginal areas of South Asia. The PhD study draws upon research conducted since 1998 by the Department (Kollmair 2003; Müller-Böker 2003; Backhaus et al. 2001) and is supported by a series of master-level studies from Nepal and Switzerland. That international labour migration has been an important livelihood strategy for rural Nepalese families for generations has been shown in more recent studies (Gurung 2003; Müller-Böker & Thieme forthcoming; Wyss 2003; Blaikie et al. 2002; Gurung & Thieme 2002; Upreti 2002; Graner 2001; von der Heide & Hoffmann 2001; Yamanaka 2000, 2001; Seddon et al. 1998, 2001, 2002; Pfaff 1995, 2002).

The thesis will contribute to the further understanding of the social relations among individuals within the transnational migration process and the positive and negative effects of labour migration for the migrants. Furthermore, entry points will be identified to encourage people to become more resilient and better able to capitalise on the positive aspects of migration. An integral part of the thesis is the support of migrant organisations in collaboration with NGOs in Delhi and the Nepal Institute for Development Studies in Kathmandu.

From Bajhang and Bajura (Nepal) to Delhi (India)

Due to the free border agreement between Nepal and India, the majority of migrants are not documented in official statistics. However, the number of Nepalis working in India is estimated to be up to 1.3 million. Because of an earlier survey, migrants who work in Delhi, from the four villages of Gothpada, Singra, Seragau and Meltadi, are at the centre of attention in this PhD-study. The villages are situated in the Bajura and Bajhang districts, in the centre of the Far Western Development Region. This area shows the lowest Human Development and Gender Sensitive Development Index within Nepal (NESAC 1998; UNDP 2002) and was seriously affected by the internal political crisis. The daily life of these communities is governed by very strictly practised rules of interaction. The majority of the population belongs to the high Hindu castes, which are distinctly separated from the *low castes*, the so-called *untouchables* (Cameron 1998). In Singra, Seragau and Gothpada the whole population belongs to the Chetri caste; with the family clans Rawal and Rokaya. In Meltadi the people belong to the high castes of Bahun, Thakuri and Chetri as well as to the low castes of Sarki, Kami, Damai and Badi (Müller 2001: 54-55). The most important institution is the *riti-bhāgya* system – the traditional patron-client system between high-caste and low-caste families. Subsistence-oriented agriculture is an important livelihood pillar, but only a fraction of the people are able to produce enough food. Low caste people in particular do not own sufficient land to ensure their food security. Many people have to borrow grain or money at high interest rates of between 3 and 10 % per month. A crucial

problem is the high level of indebtedness of the majority of people. (Müller-Böker 2003)

At least two thirds of the households rely on remittances mainly from Delhi in India, which is therefore the main research site. The vast majority of the migrants are men and work as watchmen (Müller 2001; Müller-Böker 2003). Migrants rely on networks among their fellow-villagers in Delhi to get established, find work and reasonable accommodation. Jobs are arranged by friends or co-villagers, and some have to "buy" their job from a predecessor at a high price. Wealthier families are only prepared to give loans for the "seed capital" to those who have collateral, such as land. Being indebted is not only a risk for the migrant, but also for the migrant's family remaining in the village. In the worst case, migration might even lead to greater indebtedness.

Research objectives

The study emphasises the institutional arrangements through which migrants gain access to resources, how they determine the process of migration and shape the migrants' everyday life in Delhi. Specifically, these are institutions influencing the patterns of managing and sending home remittances, organising employment and shelter, and gender issues.

Managing and sending home remittances:

To support their families back home and to repay their debts, migrants often need greater amounts of money than they earn per month. Drinking and gambling are also important reasons why men need money urgently. Because none of them has access to a bank loan, they established a variety of financial self-help associations in Delhi. We will investigate why and how migrants invest money in financial self-help associations. A comparative analysis of the financial self-help associations used, their strengths and weaknesses, their accessibility, and the possibilities of benefits and losses for the migrants and their families will be provided. Furthermore, the process of the remittance transfer will be clarified.

Employment and shelter:

Nepalis have migrated to Delhi to work as watchmen for generations, and they continue to do so. The small number of accompanying women also have their jobs arranged by their husbands. Since the male migrants occupy the niche of working as watchmen, it will be clarified how their networks operate and what working and living conditions they face.

Gender:

Although predominantly men migrate, sometimes women follow. The foci are social relations among men and women, activities in productive and reproductive work, access and control over resources, services, and networks and distinct needs of men and women.

Conceptual Framework

To study labour migration from Far West Nepal to Delhi the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework was chosen as the analytical frame (Chambers et al. 1992, DFID 2001). Most rural families do not rely on agriculture alone but adopt a range of livelihood strategies, such as migration. This strategy is strongly linked with human, social and financial assets. Additionally, the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework covers the process of gaining and retaining access to resources and opportunities, dealing with risks and negotiating social relationships (DFID, 2001). It emphasises that migration is embedded and tightly structured by institutional arrangements like networks and kinship through which migrants gain access to resources and which determine the migration process (Boyd 1989; Castles & Millers 1993; de Haan et al. 2002: 38-39; de Haan 2002; Goss et al. 1995; Kritz et al. 1992; Massey 1990; Portes & Sensenbrenner 1993).

The concept of transnational migration facilitates an investigation of the extent to which this process leads to the emergence of transnational social spaces (Pries 1997, 1998, 2001). The patterns of obtaining employment and shelter, the ways in which migrants run financial self-help associations and how they transfer their money back home reflects the existence of transnational social spaces and help us to understand social structures and institutions are produced and reproduced (Pries 2001: 55-56). The individual and his/her supportive networks are the starting unit of analysis and the most efficient way of investigating the institutional underpinnings of transnationalism and its structural effects (Portes et al. 1999: 220).

At the outset of the project a combined qualitative study of the remaining migrants' families in Far West Nepal and the migrants in Delhi was planned. But due to the political upheaval and insecurity, fieldwork in Far West Nepal could not be carried out up to now. For the time being the main research site is Delhi.

Secondary data from the earlier household surveys serve as the base of the PhD study. In 2002 the migrants were visited in Delhi. Various research strategies, from Participatory Appraisal and in-depth interviews to group discussions and participatory observation have been implemented so far.

Preliminary Results

Impoverishment, indebtedness and unemployment in Bajura and Bajhang as well as job opportunities in Delhi and the long-standing tradition of migration have led to large-scale labour migration to India. For the migrants the urban environment of Delhi is very alien. They have to overcome the social distance between the rural society of origin and the urban centre and especially in the beginning have difficulties in coping with the increased complexity. To cover their living costs, travel expenses, payment for the job in Delhi and other extra expenditures such as marriages, they either take loans from wealthier families in the villages or they take loans from savings and credit associations in Delhi, which are run by the migrants from the villages. Two main kinds of savings and credit associations were identified, namely *chits* and *societies* (Müller-Böker & Thieme forthcoming). Both have money saving and lending as a primary function. But not all the migrants were aware of both kinds of associations. One main difference is that while *chits* are only used for private investments, *societies* are often used for collective investments in the home villages like school building and temple reconstruction. For a short time women have been starting to establish their own societies. Because of the specific character of the fund rotation in a *chit*, *chits* can also perpetuate debt and dependency. Therefore migration may not always improve income or security. On the other hand, *chits* seem to be more integrative in terms of caste and gender.

Remittances from India are transferred solely by the migrants themselves or by friends and mainly spent on consumer goods rather than on land purchase and livestock. Some migrants do not even send goods or money but only “eat outside” as another case study in a village of the district Bajhang confirms (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2002). Contrary to the findings in Delhi, a master’s thesis from our department has shown that migrants from wealthier regions like Pokhara go predominantly to Gulf and Tiger States and send greater remittances (up to 960 US\$) back to Nepal (Wyss 2003).

With their work as watchmen and their existing financial self-help groups in Delhi, the migrants have managed to find an economic and social niche. As the majority does not acquire new skills or attitudes, it seems that their marginality is manifested once more. The drastic differences between the urbanity in Delhi and rural life in remote mountains, along with the lack of basic infrastructure and social service, seem to be paralysing. On the other hand, traditional rules and regulations from the marginalized background in Nepal dissolve in Delhi to a certain extent.

Another crucial point is the fact that the migrants in Delhi lack bargaining power in negotiating with their employers due to the low awareness of general labour legislation and rights. The decisive development issue seems not to be how to reduce migration, but how to reduce its social and economic costs and increase its returns, especially for the poorest. Labour opportunities and wage earning capacity need to be gradually separated from debt, advanced sale of labour, and high interest repayments.

An important instrument within the NCCR is the implementation of research results to support the affected population. Based on first results of the ongoing PhD study, a NCCR-funded project with a NGO in Delhi regarding economic literacy, such as earning money, saving, spending and managing remittances started in May 2003.

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